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Categories of Problems among International Students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the most disturbing categories of problems among international students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. The questionnaires were sent to 135 international students which had been selected based on multi sampling (stratified sampling and systematic sampling). Mooney Problem Check List (MPCL) was used to identify the categories of problems among international students. This instrument consists of 11 categories of problems. The categories include Health, Finances, Lifestyle and Career, Social and Recreational, Psychological Social Relation, Personal relationships and Emotional, Marriage and Sexual, Family, Moral and Religious, Adapting to academic Work, Future Career Adapting, Curriculum and Method of Teaching Problems. Suggestions and recommendations were also collected through interviews. Data collected was analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS for Windows v. 15). Pareto Principle was used to identify the most disturbing items in each category of problems. Results show that the most disturbing categories of problems among international students at UTM are Social and Recreational Problems and Curriculum and Method of Teaching Problems.

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Keywords: International students; categories of problems; most disturbing problems, Pareto Principle

1. Introduction

Higher education is an improving issue in Malaysia. Presenting new courses and programs in universities, increasing the number of universities and accepting higher numbers of students each year in Malaysian universities shows the importance of education in Malaysia. Mohamed Khaled Nordin, Minister of Higher Education in Malaysia says “*We are in a global world and Malaysia wants to be a global player. We need to share knowledge and need collaboration worldwide. So, our role is to produce the type of graduate that can fit into all these things*” (Oxford, 2010). The number of students of different nationalities can be seen as witnesses to show that Malaysia is extremely conducive to studying and sharing knowledge. The number of students registered in tertiary institutions increased from 170,000 in 1985 to about 230,000 in 1990, and about 730,000 in 2005 (Hassan, 2006). There are more than 90,000 international students currently studying in institutions of higher learning in Malaysia (Abdullah, 2009; Yusliza, 2010; Yusliza & Chelliah, 2010). Most of these students are from Indonesia, China, Iran, Pakistan,

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Maldives, India, Myanmar, Taiwan, Sri Lanka and even as far as Belgium (SEGI, 2010). The issues of greatest concern to international students are the challenges of higher education and getting used to new ways of learning and thinking, as international students come from different countries with different backgrounds (Bektaş, 2008; Directgov, 2011; C. Lin, 2010). Based on Sovic (2009), international students are disparate in groups and they have different backgrounds, experience, skills, command of English and ages. Therefore, it is true that international students face more difficulties to adapting to the new situation. Different people face different problems because they are from different cultures and nations (Lee & Rice, 2007). These difficulties and problems complicate students' lives. By not considering the needs and adjustments of international students, students feeling unfulfilled, disappointed, and even exploited (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). It is important to investigate international students' problems. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to identify categories of problems among international postgraduate students in UTM.

1.1 Different Problems among International Students

International students face problems in different areas. Problems in the field of language, finance, social, psychological, health, recreational and academic are seen as common problems among international students (Andrade, 2006; Hus, 2003; G. Lin & Yi, 1997; Lui, 2009; Sherry, et al., 2010; Sovic, 2009; Yeh & Inose, 2002). Based on Hus (2003), international students' problems are career choices, language problems, homesickness, cultural adjustment, relationship, self-esteem and discrimination issues. Social interaction and communication problems, social connectedness, social support, language barriers, homesickness, academic, financial are the common difficulties among Chinese international students in United States (Lui, 2009; Yeh & Inose, 2002). The experiences of international students highlight problems in the field of health and finances insurance, adapting to a new culture and homesickness, lack of understanding from the broader university community and of the English language. Spoken language barriers are more common than written language problems among international students. Many international students feel that people at the university do not understand their culture (Billikopf, 2009; Nippoda, 2002; Sherry, et al., 2010). The differences between cultures may lead to experiences of interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts among international students. Therefore, international students must find a balance between two cultures (G. Lin & Yi, 1997). High social connectedness among international students lead to less psychological stress and an easier adjustment to the new social environment (Lui, 2009). In addition, the loss of a social support system among international students can have a significant negative influence on the psychological well-being of students, including depression and loneliness. International students tend to feel a deep sense of loss in moving to another country after leaving friends and families (Lui, 2009; Sandhu, 1994) and psychological stressors such as changing in support system may lead to social isolation (G. Lin & Yi, 1997). Fluency in the English language play highlight role in academic classes as students feel comfortable in articulating their knowledge on essay exams, in classrooms or in research papers. In contrast, international students with a low level of fluency in English negatively affects their psychological well-being, and these students may not eligible to receive teaching assistantships in universities or other facilities (G. Lin & Yi, 1997). Homesickness is another important stressor issue that international students face. They often miss their family, friends or their ethnic cuisine and they daydream of memories back home (G. Lin & Yi, 1997; Lui, 2009). Academic difficulties are positively correlated with adjusting to this new culture. Students who have problems in academic areas such a teaching styles or understanding class lecturers cannot adjust to new conditions easily (G. Lin & Yi, 1997).

1.2 Categories of Problems among International students

Categorizing the problems among international students can facilitate prevention of these problems. Some studies have categorized the problems facing international students. These categories are composed of several items or subsets to identify the problems among students (Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2009; Lebcir, Wells, & Bond, 2008; Mooney & Gordon, 1950; Sandhu, 1994; Yusliza & Chelliah, 2010). Based on Sandhu (1994) two categories including Intrapersonal and Interpersonal factors affect international students. Intrapersonal factors originate from the student himself and include a profound sense of loss, a sense of inferiority and a sense of uncertainty about the future. Interpersonal factors are related to the culture and environment and include communication problems, culture shock, and loss of social support. There are also some miscellaneous factors, which are not classified. These factors are differences in culture languor, immigration difficulties, different educational systems and academic restrictions

(Sandhu, 1994). According to Yusliza & Chelliah (2010), adjustments by students fall into two categories: Socio-cultural adjustments are related to behavioral ability to fit in and can viewed from a social learning perspective predicted by variables related to the social skills acquisitions and cognitive factors. Psychological adjustments related to anxiety depression and well-being can understood from the stress and coping framework, as well as predicted and explained by personality and life changes and social support variables. Moony & Gordon (1950), created 11 student problem categories. These categories are: Health and Physical Development, Finances, Living Conditions, and Employment, Social and Recreational Activities, Social-Psychological Relations, Marriage and Sexual Problems, Home and Family, Morals and religion, Adjustment to College Work, The Future: Vocational and Educational, Curriculum and Teaching procedure. Al-Zubaidi and Rechards (2009), categorized international students' problems in 3 categories: Cultural Difficulties, Academic Difficulties and Languages Difficulties. Cultural difficulties refer to multicultural identity, including the students' religion, ethnic background, the food and lifestyle in Malaysia. Academic difficulties refer to the academic system, lecturers and methodology of teaching in Malaysia and Languages Difficulties refer to Language Laboratories, Audio Visual Material (Listening and speaking tapes, language software etc), Reference Books, Internet access.

1.3 Conceptual Framework of Study

In this study international students were selected from a pool of postgraduate students (master level) from countries which have the highest number of students in UTM. These countries are: Iran, Arab Saudi, and China. Based on Mooney Problem Check List, problems are divided to 11 categories as below:

Health Problems, Financial and Lifestyle Problems, Social and Recreational Problems, Psychological Social Relations Problems, Personal Relationships and Emotional Problems, Marriage and Sexual Problems, Family Problems, Morals and Religious Problems, Academic Work Problems, Future Career Problems, Curriculum and Method of Teaching Problems.

1.4 Theoretical framework of Study

Based on Maslow theory, human behaviours are motivated by a hierarchy of needs. In this theory, five requirements are inherent but the way to satisfy them is acquisitive. Need at the head of the pyramid certainly require attention more than lower needs? If people are not satisfied at one stage they will face problems in the next stage (Maslow, 1968). Thus, according to Maslow students should meet their needs to increase their satisfaction and reduce their problems.

Rotter (1954), in his social learning theory, considers both internal and external issues of the organism, which means internal consolidations and the complex cognitive process and says new behaviour is shaped by observing others. Based on Rotter's point of view as an individual is in the interaction with the environment he can be controlled by either internal or external factors. These two sources of control have different effects on behaviour. When one's learning is not in the line with his psychological needs, dissatisfaction will emerged (Rotter, 1954). Hence, according to Rotter students' learning conditions should be proportionate with their psychological needs.

Fromm (1990), in his Social Psychoanalytic Theory, believes that the reason for mental discomfort is disorganization in the society. He believes that sane humans grow in a sane society. In order to achieve a healthy social life for human beings, they need to come to a general agreement on certain points of view. If there are adverse conditions, social life will be broken off and people cannot achieve social communication and understanding. The other need of human being is the need to appertain to somewhere. Human have fear of absolute freedom (Fromm, 1990). Therefore, humans' needs are in the society and society has been changed to accommodate human needs. Hence, UTM should accommodate students' needs.

2. Method

2.1 Participants and procedure

This study identifies categories of problems among international students. The scope of this study is international postgraduate students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), International campus. Multi sampling was used to select the sample. First, based on stratified sampling, 3 countries with the highest number of students selected from 18 countries. Out of 256 students from 18 countries, total 135 students was selected based on Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sample table. Second, the questionnaires were sent to students based on systematic sampling (list of students' name). The female participants were 42% (n=57) and male participants were 58% (n=78). The sample contains 87% (n=117) participants from Iran, 7% (n=10) from Arab Saudi and 6% (n=8) from China.

2.2 Instrument

Exploratory mix method was used for the purpose of this study. Mooney Problem Check List (MPCL) which was modified by Syed Mohamed Shafeq* was used as quantitative and main method. Part A of this questionnaire deals with demographic information and Part B is situated by 232 items in 11 categories. The categories include Health Related Problems (16 items), Financial and Lifestyle Problems (22 items), Social and Recreational Problems (27 items), Psychological Social Relation Problems (24 items), Personal Relationships and Emotional Problems (23 items), Marriage and Sexual Problems (23 items), Family Problems (14 items), Moral and Religious Problems (15 items), Adapting to Academic Work Problems (26 items), Future Career Adapting Problems (18 items), Curriculum and Method of Teaching Problems (24 items). Reliability and validity were accepted (Cronbach alpha =0.84). As well, qualitative research approach was used in order to support the findings. The interviews were conducted with 3 heads from each society. These presidents were invited for interviews because they were the representatives of their countries' students and they know about the problems they face.

2.3 Data analyze

Collected data was analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS, v. 15). Descriptive Statistic was used for Statistical Technique. The most disturbing items were found by using Pareto Principle which believes that 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes; therefore, 5 most disturbing items in each category are the disturbing problems in UTM.

3. Findings

3.1 Questionnaire Results

Table 1: Categories of Problems Faced by International Students

No	Categories	Percentage
1	Health Related Problems	4.0
2	Financial, Lifestyle and Career Related Problems	10.0
3	Social and Recreational Problems	19.0
4	Psychological Social Relation Problems	7.0
5	Personal Relationships and Emotional Problems	9.0
6	Marriage and Sexual Problems	6.0
7	Family Problems	6.0
8	Moral and Religious Problems	6.0
9	Adapting to Academic Work Problems	10.0
10	Future Career Adapting Problems	11.0
11	Curriculum and Method of Teaching Problems	12.0

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From total 11 categories of problems which are displayed in table 1 and based on Pareto Principle, 2 categories of problems are the most disturbing categories of problems among international students in UTM. These categories of problems are regarding recreational (19%) and curriculum and teaching method (12%).

Table 2: Items in Most Disturbing Categories of Problems among International Students

Category of Social and Recreational Problems			Category of Curriculum and Method of Teaching Problems		
No	Items	Percentage	No	Items	Percentage
1	Lack of recreations	45.9	1	Unable to get required books	29.6
2	Lack of exercising opportunities	54.8	2	College is not concerned of students needs	46.7
3	Lack of time for art and music	65.2	3	Boring classes	34.1
4	Lack of opportunities for entertainment	60.7	4	Too many poor lecturers	44.4
5	Lack of time for myself	40.7	5	Lecturers are inefficient in teaching a certain subject	39.3
6	Inefficient use of free time	56.3	6	Lecturer has a bad personality	20.7
7	Willing to improve my thoughts	77.0	7	Lack of a good college advisor	54.8
8	Need more opportunity to express myself	63.0	8	Lack of one to one help from lecturers	48.9
9	Uncomfortable in meeting people	20.0	9	Lack of opportunity to speak to lecturers	38.5
10	Uncomfortable during dates	20.0	10	Lecturers are not interested in students	27.4
11	Late in communicating with others	29.6	11	Lecturers are not concerned about student's feelings	50.4
12	Lack of involvement in student activities	48.9	12	Lack of discussion in class	31.1
13	Boring weekends	62.2	13	Classes are as those in high schools	27.4
14	Interested in dancing	54.1	14	Lots of work and assignments	53.3
15	Interested in entertaining	83.0	15	Lecturers are too theoretical	47.4
16	Interested in changing appearance	51.9	16	Teaching is inefficient	39.3
17	Interested in improving ethics	72.6	17	Subjects are not related to course	20
18	Facing difficulties in continuing a conversation	26.7	18	Too many rules and regulations	23.7
19	Lack of sports skills	41.5	19	Unable to get the wanted course	31.9
20	Lack of opportunities in enjoying the environment	59.3	20	Unfair grades	32.6
21	Lack of opportunity to continue a hobby	60.0	21	Unfair tests	31.1
22	Lack of time to enjoy reading	48.9	22	Poor arrangement of campus activities	58.5
23	Interested in more discussions	73.3	23	Less lively campus	57.0
24	Lack of opportunities to enjoy own interests	58.5	24	Campus is lack of recreational facilities	65.2
25	Lack of social life	45.9			
26	No enjoyment during holidays	53.3			
27	Interested in vacations	72.6			

From total items in 2 categories of problems which are displayed in table 2 and according to Pareto Principle, 5 items are the highest disturbing items in each category. The most disturbing items in category of Social and Recreational Problems are "interested in entertaining" by 83%, "willing to improve my thoughts" by 77.0%, "interested in more discussions" by 73%, "interested in improving ethics" by 72.6% and "interested in vacations" by 72.6%. The highest disturbing items in category of Curriculum and Method of Teaching Problems are "campus is lack of recreational facilities" by 58.7%, "poor arrangement of campus activities" by 58.5%, "less lively campus" by 57.0%, "lack of a good college advisor" by 54.8% and "lots of work and assignments" by 53.3%.

3.2 Interview Results

Results of interviews are summarized as below: All international students mentioned that lack of announcements in UTM is a critical issue. They don't inform about programs or information about UTM. Also, students have

problems with lecturers' English accent, which they said is strongly Malay accent. The main problem among international students is the entertainments facilities on campus. They need more facilities for exercise and entertaining. In addition, most of the students are not satisfied with the level of teaching in UTM, and they worried that they cannot pass their exams. The main problem among Arab Saudi students is lack of time. They claim that they have to do so many assignments. They also express that lecturers differentiate between local and international students, and that lecturers are not concerned about students' needs. The main problem among Chinese students is recreational facilities such as sport facilities. They need more activities and exercise in campus.

4. Conclusion

Since international students come from different countries, they will face different problems (Bektaş, 2008; Directgov, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; C. Lin, 2010; Sovic, 2009). Like other such students, international students in UTM also face different problems. This study identifies 232 items in 11 categories of problems among international students in UTM. Due to the large number of items the results focus on the highest disturbing categories of problems based on Pareto Principle. Based on the findings and the Pareto Principle, 2 major categories are the most disturbing. The first category is Social and Recreational Problems. These results are consistent with findings of Allahdad (2010), Lin & Yi (1997), and interview results. Also, these finding supported by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Fromm's Social Psychoanalytic Theory. Students are requiring recreation to avoid from some problems such psychological problems. Lui (2009), believes that social problems can be the source of mental health problems. The second big category of problem is Curriculum and Method of Teaching. These results are supported with findings of (Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2009; Allahdad, 2010; G. Lin & Yi, 1997), interview results and also Rotter's Social Learning Theory and Fromm's Social Psychoanalytic Theory. Biggs (1990), believes that Method of Teaching not only provide a 'climate' for learning, but also have motivational consequences. Therefore, curriculum is required for better collaboration among lecturers, helping them understand how their instructional decisions contribute to students' overall learning.

Finally, results suggest UTM to;

- Distribute literature containing necessary information about the adjustment process, educational system, banking system, counselling services, university rules and regulations and programs such as workshops and seminars. UTM's facilities should be utilized to inform all international students about UTM and its facilities.
- Explore greater levels of support to enhance both students and lecturers' English language ability for better communication.
- Provide sports facilities such as a gym for students as well as organize short scientific trips.
- Organize more relevant seminars and workshops featuring lectures by visiting professors concerning up to date technology and science to motivate students to develop new ideas. This causes teachers and students to focus on recent findings in their field and not to waste time on banal issues.

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